

Message Text

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TAGS: OVIP, AF

SUBJ: BIOGRAPHIC BRIEF ON PRESIDENT MOHAMMAD DAOUD

1. FOLLOWING FOR DEPARTMENT'S USE IN PREPARING BIOGRAPHIC SHEETS FOR THE SECRETARY'S VISIT TO AFGHANISTAN IS BIO ON PRESIDENT DAOUD (PRON: DAH-OD).

2. PRESIDENT DAOUD IS A TOUGH, WILY LEADER WHOSE METHODS RESEMBLE MORE THOSE OF A TRIBAL OR MAFIA "FAMILY" LEADER THAN A LEADER OF A MODERN STATE. HIS TRIBAL INSTINCTS ARE DEMONSTRATED IN HIS ESPOUSAL OF SELF-DETERMINATION FOR HIS FELLOW PUSHTUNS WHO RESIDE IN PAKISTAN AND IN HIS TENDENCY TO RULE THROUGH PERSONAL AND USUALLY SECRET CONTACT WITH TRIBAL AND OTHER GROUP LEADERS, TO WIRE EVERYTHING TOGETHER BEHIND THE SCENES, THEN TO ACT DECISIVELY AND TO DEAL SEVERELY WITH DISSENTERS. HIS SEIZURE OF POWER IN 1973, TEN YEARS AFTER HE HAD BEEN OUSTED AS PRIME MINISTER BY HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW KING ZAHIR, WAS A WORK OF ART THAT ANY MAFIA GODFATHER WOULD ADMIRE.

YET DAOUD IS ALSO ONE OF THE GREAT MODERNIZERS OF AFGHAN-ISTAN, AND HE IS PASSIONATELY DEVOTED TO HIS COUNTRY'S MODERNIZATION IN THE 50'S AND EARLY 60'S, AS DEFENSE MINISTER AND PRIME MINISTER, HE FOUNDED AND BECAME THE TRUE LEADER OF THE MODERN AFGHAN ARMED FORCES WHICH ARE NOT ONLY THE SUPPORT OF HIS REGIME BUT ALSO THE MOST IMPORTANT CENTRALIZING FORCE IN A COUNTRY DIVIDED BY TRIBAL AND ETHNIC GROUPINGS. HE IS ALSO THE MAINSPRING BEHIND CENTRALIZED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING. LESS CLEAR,

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HOWEVER, IS WHAT PLANS DOUD HAS FOR THE POLITICAL MODERNIZATION

OF HIS COUNTRY, ESPECIALLY IN LIGHT OF THE FACT THAT THERE IS NO PRESENT BASIS FOR DECIDING ON THE SUCCESSION TO HIS RULE.

A MAJOR QUESTION ABOUT DAOUD AS A RULER IS WHETHER HP "GOD-FATHER INSTINCTS AND METHODS ARE COMPATIBLE WITH MODERNIZATION. FOR EXAMPLE, HE SYSTEMATICALLY USES HIS CABINET TO ASSIST HIM IN MAKING POLICY, BUT MANY ABLE, EDUCATED AFGHANS ARE EXCLUDED FROM HIS CIRCLE BECAUSE OF PAST ASSOCIATIONS WITH HIS OPPONENTS, OFTEN OTHER MEMBERS OF HIS TRIBAL CLAN.

IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DAOUD IS A FIRM CHAMPION OF NON-ALIGNMENT AND INDEPENDENCE. WHILE HE RELIES HEAVILY ON THE USSR, ESPECIALLY AS THE SOLE SOURCE OF HIS MILITARY EQUIPMENT, HE NOT ONLY A COUNTER-BALANCING US PRESENCE IN AFGHANISTAN, BUT ALSO GETS EXTREMELY TOUCHY AT ANY HINT THAT HIS REGIME IS SOVIET-ORIENTED. HE HARBORS A DEEP GRUDGE AGAINST AMERICAN POLICIES OF THE 1950'S WHEN HE, AS PRIME MINISTER, FELT THAT WE WROTE AFGHANISTAN OFF AND PUT OUR EGGS IN PAKISTAN'S BASKET. THIS GRUDGE LEADS HIM EVEN NOW SOMETIMES TO SUSPECT THAT THE US IS PLOTTING AGAINST HIS REGIME.

DAOUD LIKES TO SAY HE IS A POLITICIAN AND A SOLDIER AND NOT A DIPLOMAT AND THAT THEREFORE HE LIKES FRANK, BLUNT TALK. HE HAS CHARM AND GREETES GUESTS WITH TRADITIONAL AFGHAN CORDIALITY. HE IS NOT GOOD AT SMALL TALK. HE SPEAKS AND UNDERSTANDS FRENCH AND UNDERSTANDS BUT DOES NOT SPEAK ENGLISH. HE LIVES A RATHER PURITANICAL LIFE, SELDON VENTURING OUTSIDE THE PALACE COMPOUND AND DRESSING SIMPLY. HE NEITHER SMOKES NOR DRINKS. IN HIS MID-SIXTIES HE APPEARS IN REASONABLY GOOD HEALTH BUT IS OVERWEIGHT.
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